

O 111650Z JUN 00
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1415
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY ANKARA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 002985

NICOSIA FOR ILMG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/11/10

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SUBJECT: ASAD SITREP 03: BASHAR PROMOTED TO COMMANDER-
IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES; KHADDAM
SIGNS DECREES BUT IS NOT ACTING PRESIDENT

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR RYAN C. CROCKER, REASON 1.5 (B)
AND (D)

¶1. (U) SYRIAN TELEVISION REPORTED THE AFTERNOON OF 6/11 THAT VICE PRESIDENT KHADDAM HAD SIGNED DECREE NUMBERS 9 AND 10, PROMOTING COLONEL BASHAR AL-ASAD TO THE RANK OF GENERAL AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES.

¶2. (C) THE MOST OBVIOUS EFFECT OF THIS IS THAT BASHAR HAS NOW OFFICIALLY ASSUMED ONE OF THE PRESIDENT'S "THREE HATS," I.E. HEAD OF THE ARMED FORCES, HEAD OF THE PARTY, AND HEAD OF STATE. BASHAR IS EXPECTED TO BECOME HEAD OF THE BA'TH PARTY AT THE PARTY CONGRESS, STILL EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE JUNE 17-22, AND HEAD OF STATE AFTER A PUBLIC REFERENDUM WHICH COULD BE HELD AS EARLY AS JUNE 25.

¶3. (C) THIS DEVELOPMENT ALSO POINTS MORE CLEARLY TO HOW WE BELIEVE THE DECISION-MAKING GROUP IS HANDLING THE ISSUE OF "WHO'S IN CHARGE." NO INDIVIDUAL HAS BEEN APPOINTED ACTING PRESIDENT, ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT IS STICKING AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO CONSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE AND THUS KHADDAM, AS FIRST VICE PRESIDENT, IS RESPONSIBLE FOR SIGNING DECREES. HOWEVER, WE NOTE THAT KHADDAM IS NOT BEING REFERRED TO AS ACTING PRESIDENT, NOR HAS HE MADE ANY PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT. THIS IS LIKELY DELIBERATE. THE DECISION-MAKING GROUP AT THIS POINT IS LIKELY COMPRISED OF BASHAR, 'ASIF SHAWQAT, FM SHARA, DEFMIN TALAS, AND PERHAPS OTHERS. KHADDAM IS APPARENTLY COOPERATING AS TITULAR SIGNER OF DECREES UNTIL BASHAR CAN TAKE OVER OFFICIALLY.

CROCKER